

INTERVIEWEE: RAYMOND and OLIVE PEDERSON

INTERVIEWER: PATRICIA YOUNG

SUBJECT:

DATE: 26 June 1980

TRANSCRIBER: Linda A. Jantzen

Y: This is an interview with Raymond and Olive Peterson for the Historical Society of Palm Desert Oral History Project on June 26, 1980, at one thirty in the afternoon, at their home in Fallbrook.

Okay, I think this afternoon let's start by talking first about what you were doing prior to coming to the area and how you became interested in that particular area near La Quinta.

OP: Well, I don't think he will be able to talk to tell you anything.

Y: Fine. Can you . . .

OP: But I think I know pretty much . . .

Y: Good.

OP: What you want. His main interest was to raise flowers.

He was looking for a place where he could raise flowers through the winter for the wholesale market. And he decided on that place and the man who had homesteaded our piece was Frieda Marshall's husband, George Marshall, and he or his father had been an associate of, was it Jacqueline Cochran or Jacqueline Cochran's . . . I guess he had worked for *Odum* at some other place because he was the one who was responsible for Jacqueline Cochran coming into the Valley, but he had homesteaded our property. And my husband bought it from him.

PY: Had it homesteaded more than just your section?

OP: I don't think so. And Jack Berkett's grandfather had homesteaded the other eighty acres, and we bought eighty acres.

PY: So you were right next to the Berkett . . .

OP: Yes. And there was three hundred and some acres next to us, to the south, and I don't know who owned that at that time. A Mr. Cook had it later and sold it for two hundred dollars an acre.

PY: Was that C. E. Cook that had property in Indian Wells?

OP: No. He was a nurseryman that lived in Montebello. I don't know whether he had dreams of raising flowers down there or not, but he had it quite a number of years.

And then it was sold for that price and I guess it's worth quite a number of thousands of dollars today.

PY: Now when did Mr. Peterson come to the area and what was he doing, where was he living at the time he bought the property?

OP: Well, you were living in Beverly Hills at that time, weren't you? His father was a building contractor up there and he was working with his father. And he also had a friend that was, what was his name? Jimmy. It was a French name, but I can't remember it. And he had been to Mexico with this man and had flown this man's airplane for him. And they landed right, did you land . . .

RP: *Right in the hotel*

OP: You landed on the property?

RP: Well, it was the property of where the *hotel* is.

OP: Oh.

RP: But it was just

OP: Yes. Well, he bought that property first. That is a piece that was next door to Frances Hack. Do you know her place? And then later he bought the eighty acres and that was where he built a home. And then after we were married, that was where we lived. And the hundred

and sixty acres he sold off in smaller pieces over the years. We don't have any of that now.

PY: So you bought eighty acres where you landed the plane.

RP: No.

OP: No, a hundred and sixty acres.

PY: Hundred and sixty.

OP: And then for quite a number of years that same piece, after he bought it, was used by La Quinta Hotel as the landing strip for their guests that flew in. And I don't think it's been developed yet, but the people that own it have dreams of doing something if they ever get the storm drain through there because it does go through part of that property.

PY: Did you buy that property with the thought in mind also of raising flowers on it or using it as a landing strip?

RP: I went there, what happened, I went to Mexico and on the way home we had to land somewhere and in all the Valley that was the only place and *I landed where the hotel is* and then Walter *Morgan* took us to Indio and . . .

OP: Did you stay overnight in Indio?

RP: No, we stayed out at the ranch, his ranch. We slept at his place. (chuckle) *Walter Morgan* was the owner of the hotel and we came back, that was in 1923, and

in 1925 I bought . . .

OP: A hundred and sixty acres.

RP: I bought that piece and we couldn't get
and I bought this other place.

OP: The road didn't go up that far. That was why he didn't do anything on that. I'd forgotten that. There was just a track through the sand and you'd get stuck in the sand every time. And just, well, two or three years ago we finally sold most of our interest in the eighty-acre home ranch and we found out in giving the deed to the buyer that we had never given the county permission to have Washington Street run by our place. If we'd know it, we'd have caused some trouble because at one time we wanted to sell our place for a mobile home park and the owners of the hotel got most of the people in the Chamber of Commerce to go up to the Board of Supervisors and fight us because they didn't want, what they called, a trailer park that close to the hotel. And if we'd known that we owned that street, we'd have closed it so they couldn't get to their hotel. But we didn't know it until the deed was transferred. But we had to sign the deed then or give the county the right of way on Washington Street.

PY: Did you build the house yourself?

RP: Yes.

PY: Was it difficult to get materials?

RP: No.

OP: It was an adobe house. The brick blocks were made right there.

RP: I made a box and everything like that.

PY: Did you have help?

RP: Asked for some help.

PY: Was Joe Valansuela back at the La Quinta Hotel at that time making tile?

OP: No.

RP: He worked later.

OP: He came in when the hotel was already built, didn't he?

RP: Yes.

OP: And made the tile for the hotel.

RP: Yes. Is he alive yet?

PY: I don't know that he's still, does he still around there?

OP: No, he isn't down there. The last that we heard of him, he was in a place called Aberhill that is near Corona and they make tile over there of all kinds. They have whatever you call the mining for the clay, clay pit over there, but now, whether he's still alive,

we haven't heard in years.

RP: He's pretty old. *1976* and he was
twenty years old, older than I am. I knew him when he
worked for me.

PY: Really!

RP: Yes. He worked for me.

PY: Making tiles or . . .

RP: Yes.

PY: Was he working for you when he made tiles for everyone
in the Valley area?

RP: No.

OP: Well, he just made the tiles for the jobs that you did.

RP: Yes.

PY: Oh.

OP: He built the home that Jacqueline Cochran has now. It
was built for Steve Griffith, a paving contractor, and
then it was sold to Kirsteiner. And then I understand
that Jacqueline Cochran bought it from Mrs. Kirsteiner,
not too many years ago, and then he also built a home
for Zane Grey down in the Oasis area. And I guess the
tile was used on both those houses. Well, that's what
he means when Joe worked for him.

PY: Who were your neighbors?

RP: There was just one.

PY: Who was that?

OP: Well, there were up where the hotel is or right in that area there was Walter Morgan. He had homesteaded that ground and then built the hotel. And then there was a Sid Ices, I believe his name is, I-C-E-S. His brother was a secretary in the U. S. Government to some department, but I don't know whether it was agriculture or what department it was, and then a relative of his or his wife's by the name of Vaden owned a place and had planted trees there. That is just at the entrance going into the tract of La Quinta. It would be southwest of the hotel or southwest corner. I was down there a year ago last April and I think part of that stormdrain was going through that area. They were taking out trees at the time and now whether homes had been built or whether it was just getting ready for the storm drain, I don't know. But up until two years ago, it still was a date ranch and he had planted a good many of the dates there. But there were those three that adjoined each other up by the hotel.

RP: There was only about four people in the whole Valley and Walter Morgan and Sid Ices and . . .

PY: Berkett?

RP: No.

OP: Vaden.

RP: That was in 1925.

OP: They lived around the hotel or where the hotel was eventually built. Then there was nothing between there and where our property was. And then going north the Berketts were next to us. And then a little further north and on the opposite side of the road was Point Happy that the Clarks owned. And that was all there was up in that area, so we knew who people were going to visit after the hotel was closed. Now the hotel always closed in April and from April until October or November, anybody that came down that drive was going to visit one of us back there, one of five people.

PY: When did the Clarks build that ranch at Point Happy?

OP: Were they there when you . . .

RP: They were there in 1943.

OP: Before you bought.

RP: Before I came. There was one other ranch that water come down and washed everything out here.

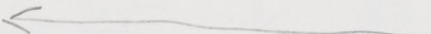
OP: Well, but you had to go in on Avenue 52 to get to that place, didn't you? You couldn't get to it from our angle.

That would have been somewhere close to the home ranch.

Do you know where that is? Well, that's on Avenue 52 and Washington. When you go straight down Washington, you run right into that place. Mr. Dawlings is the manager there. Now he's been there for a good many years. Not as long as we were there, but he can tell you a lot of the past history of the place.

PY: Now is that the place that's older and it's kind of tucked in at the end of Washington Street here?

OP: Yes, it's right at the end of Washington. I think their entrance is right there. If you didn't make the turn, you'd go right into their place.

RP: Just three or four hundred feet in. And that house was built in 1925 because I put flowers up. I did it
 so I could build this house.

OP: Are you speaking of Rosecrans' house?

RP: Yes.

OP: I didn't know you ever worked on that. That was built by Rosecrans, wasn't it? He was the son of General Rosecrans. And then he sold the Holmes, and I think that's his name.

PY: Holmes, was he involved with L. A. government or something?

OP: He was involved with the engineering of the things that

the missiles have been shot from. I don't know what you call them. The platform, that part.

PY: Launching?

OP: Yes. The launching pads.

PY: Okay. You were talking earlier about the roads in the area, what was paved and what was not.

OP: Well, the only crossroad was Jackson, which was out from Indio. There were no other roads paved in that area anyplace. It was just, and Jackson really was a one-way road. If you met anybody coming, two of your wheels had to be off from the sand and they had to do the same to get by.

PY: What about where Washington Street is now? Has that always gone right by your ranch?

OP: Well, from 1930 it was, that must have been paved at that time because I can't ever remember them paving that.

RP: *It was in the summer that they* paved it, but . . .

OP: It went by our place and it turned about where Eisenhower is and went into the back part of the hotel, and that was where Ices had a place and then the next place was Walter Morgan and the next place was Vadens. And then some years later, a good many years later, I had their

name on the tip of my tongue. I'll think of it later.

Did you hear something over there? I've had trouble with a mouse coming in my house.

PY: Yes, I heard something. I thought maybe your cassette player was on. It was turning off or something. Did you ever hear why Walter Morgan chose that area for the hotel?

OP: No.

RP: He was there I think in 1920. He came down and homesteaded and he raised alfalfa. And it was the alfalfa *that I landed on* or rather five of us.

PY: Probably dented his crop.

RP: No, it was, you know, the road goes out there, you'd *land* off the road or something.

OP: It had been mowed before you landed?

RP: Yes, about any time.

PY: (laughter) Did he convince you of the worth of the area?

RP: Well, Walter Morgan and Ices, I got acquainted with them and they arrived, two people that I knew, and I was at a party that they put on for friends of theirs who lived in Indio and they came out to Indio. And it was at that party, fifty or sixty years ago, and they said I had bought the first hundred and sixty acres

and I couldn't get any water because there was no

OP: What are you trying to think? Who you bought it from?

RP: Yes.

OP: Block. B-L-O-C-K.

RP: Yes. No, the next place, our place.

OP: Oh. Marshall.

RP: Yes. They said Marshall was the party and he
wasn't married. And they said, hey, why don't you sell
him that piece, and we were talking about the *piece*
we lost and that was in 1923.

PY: That sounds like a good way to get some property.

(laughter)

OP: Hunt is the name I was trying to think of that built a
home right across from the Vaden piece. And they were
there quite a number of years, but they've both passed
away too, so . . . well, they had started some develop-
ment in the La Quinta area, I think, when the Hunts
came in. And now it was through the Hunts that they
started the Chamber of Commerce at La Quinta and they
used to have a potluck dinner in their date packing
house. I don't remember whether the meeting was once
a month or twice a month, but everybody brought a dish
and came down and had dinner together when they started

that Chamber of Commerce.

PY: About when was that, do you remember? About when and what?

OP: Oh, in the forties it seems to me it was during the war years because I remember too that a number of the women got together and did some sewing for the Red Cross and we met at their place too. And we all knit squares to put together for an afghan for the hospital at that time, so it was during the forties, the early forties.

PY: When did the Desert Club start or why did it start, do you remember?

OP: Well, that was a development and they . . .

RP: *They asked me* what to do and they came and bought that piece of ground and . . .

PY: From Marshall? They bought that from Marshall?

RP: No.

OP: Well, Marshall had it, but whether it changed hands before they bought it, I'm not sure, but that's about where Marshall's home was, in that area.

RP: And . . .

OP: There was, I can't remember the name of the man that bought the Ices ranch and he bought the whole of the cove, all the way back, and he started that subdivision.

And then the people that were working with him, they were all Jew people, and this man was connected with the movies in some way in Hollywood. They had a scrap and so the two of them, Glick and Stone, I think was the two names.

RP: Yes.

OP: They . . .

RP: I built sixteen houses for Glick and Stone and had a fight with them too.

PY: Why did they make the lots so small?

OP: Well, it was a money-making scheme. That's when we had the Jewish people.

RP: The lots were all made fifty by a hundred and fifty, and that was it. They had six hundred or more lots

OP: In the beginning, the ones that they contacted were mostly doctors and lawyers, professional people, and those houses were built and completely furnished to the linen and the silverware and china and they sold for twenty-five hundred dollars.

PY: When was this?

OP: When they were first completed in the 1940s.

RP: I built sixty of them.

OP: And to today's standards they were pretty well built.

They were cement block homes with tile roofs.

RP: They were good houses

OP: There's a lot of them still standing, those original homes.

PY: Twenty-five hundred dollars.

RP: Twenty-five hundred dollars.

OP: There were several different styles of homes, but they were all of the block and of the tile roof.

PY: Did they just originally build the sixty that you built for them?

RP: They were built in two months. I built them in two months.

OP: She means were there others built besides what you worked on.

RP: Yes, there were.

OP: He was working for the company and there were other carpenters or builders there too. A lot of those houses were the type of blocks where they were just stacked and then they were reinforced with steel and cement was poured down the holes. There wasn't mortar between the bricks. So they went up fast and a good wind blew them down if they weren't completed. And then they had to start their building blocks all over again.

PY: Did they sell?

OP: Yes.

RP: Yes. They did.

OP: We had several people come into our ranch to ask how to get to the different areas up there because they had bought sight unseen and were hunting up their home. And they came down with the idea of spending the night there and starting to live there. It was a second home for practically everybody at that time.

PY: Was this before the war or during the war?

OP: During the war.

RP: In 1926.

PY: When?

RP: Twenty-six.

OP: Let's see. No, they started before that. Our oldest son was born in 1933, yes. And they had started about November of that year.

PY: Of thirty-three.

OP: Yes. So it was before the war years. And then when the Desert Club was built, but that was later. In that development, they promised them a clubhouse and apparently there were a lot of lives told because they were brought to court and I think both Glick and Stone

got a prison sentence out of it. But eventually the Desert Club was built to satisfy that promise, but it was not in connection with a subdivision as they had told because Glick and Stone started their own development. It was just on the opposite side of Eisenhower, I guess. All on the west of Eisenhower was what this other man, I can't remember his name.

PY: At the same time?

OP: He started it first.

PY: And he was connected with the Desert Club.

OP: Well, his salesman later started the Desert Club.

PY: But you built for Glick and Stone and that was the big subdivision.

OP: No. It was the other people who had the big subdivision. They're the ones that sold for the twenty-five hundred dollars. Now when Glick and Stone got started, I don't know what their places sold for. But at the time that he was working, Glick and Stone were the salesmen for this other party.

PY: Oh, I see. I get it.

OP: And then they got wise and bought some property cheap and started on their own, but they made so many promises and what they were picked up for was fraud through the

mail. There was a lot of fraud but because people had saved their envelopes to the letters for proof that it was fraud through the mail, that's how they got them. So if you're ever in trouble and don't like the way you're treated, be sure and save the envelope. (chuckle) Or anything they send you.

PY: You named La Quinta. Can you tell us how . . .

RP: Yes, we *drank too much* ~~at~~ that party, the first party, and we was talking about where we been and I was telling them about San Diego.

OP: And Mexico.

RP: Because I had just been there.

OP: Mexico City.

RP: Mexico. And this one guy said his father had this

Eighty acres and . . .

OP: They had the main house.

RP: Yes.

OP: And the smaller cottages around it.

PY: Where was this?

OP: In Mexico City. And it was called La Quinta.

RP: And I said they called it La Quinta. And they argued a little. That's a pretty name so we'll do it. And that's what they did. (chuckle)

OP: They had lots of parties out at Ices' home. They were veterans of World War I and the veterans in Indio, a lot of them, were out there for parties. And they had a swimming hole, a reservoir, on their place and everybody always looked for a place to swim to cool off, so they had lots of parties out there. It was at one of these parties that he had been to that they were discussing a name for the hotel.

PY: Who was the first in the area? Was it Walter Morgan?

RP: He and Ices were the first two that were ever.

OP: Well, that was right around the hotel, but I believe that Grandpa Berkett was the first man out there.

RP: Oh, that was out.

OP: Yes, that was on the opposite side of us. But he homesteaded that piece.

PY: And Marshall came later then?

OP: Well, now, of course, he was about two miles from there. In those days when you walked two miles was quite a distance, and I don't know when he came there. But now Dorothy can give you some information on that.

RP: That time I was there they had a grade that washed all over the gravel, and his house was and when it got through raining, it was way up to his . . .

OP: Well, the house was practically covered.

RP: His house was buried, and his pump and stuff were taken out high for the well. And that was just taken out of the water, just *a bit* and *that was all that was left,* so his house was buried.

PY: Who was this now? Was this Ices?

OP: Well, I don't know whether that was Marshalls' home or that was, you had to get up to that from Indio from Avenue 52. You couldn't get to it from Washington. But it was somewhere near where Rosecrans, their home place is now. It was up in that area.

RP: No, it was where . . .

OP: That was before I was there, so it was before 1925.

RP: That was, his house was where what's her name.

OP: Frances Hack.

RP: Frances Hack's house. It's not where it was.

It caught fire but it was level.

PY: Whose house was this now, Marshall's? Is that who we're talking about?

OP: No, it was somebody else.

RP: No, it was another one. I forgot *it was so long I forgot* but he asked me to go take care of his cow and horse.

He was in Los Angeles. And I was going up there to take

care of them and then that day, that night, it rained.

And I got his cow out of there just before it flooded.

I saved his cow.

OP: How about his horses.

RP: Well, they got out of that.

OP: Well, that was before 1930. I don't know anything about that.

RP: It was about 1925.

OP: Was that in the summer, a summer rain, or during the winter?

RP: I don't remember the time of the year. All I know is I was up there and saved his cow. That was the only thing *he had on his ranch* was his cow, and I took the cows onto my place.

OP: That's what neighbors did around there. Mr. Berkett used to milk and feed our cow and our mules if we'd go away and they very seldom left the Valley. But if they went away, why, he did that and occasionally I took care of the children if they weren't going to be there and she did the same for me. That was the way neighbors lived then.

PY: Can you tell me about your house?

OP: Well, it was just to begin with a four-room house, adobe,

one bathroom.

PY: What were your four rooms?

OP: Well, he had built it with the idea of being a two-family help house, and he had the foundation staked out for a bigger house. Well, he didn't get a job he was expecting to build.

RP: I sold my *first ranch* for . . .

OP: Yes, he had built this home for Steve Griffith and a friend of his was going to build across the road from him. Well, that never materialized. So the way the house was too large a rooms across the front and he cut an arch between them and put a fireplace in the one room in the corner so the one side of the arch was our bedroom. And then the living room and the kitchen and the other, the bathroom was between the back bedroom and the kitchen. Then later we built on a breakfast room off of the kitchen and then we built a bedroom and bathroom to the back. And then still later we built a big living room and used the original living room for our dining room. So that's what we had when we left there.

RP: It was a lot like (chuckle) . . .

PY: Is the house still standing?

OP: Well, the last time I was down, just the bricks are there. Everything has been stripped. People had been in and stole and everything. All the wood off the roof and just everything that was moveable. And there was one Mexican man that was still living in the help's house when we left and one day he came home and they were starting to strip the tires off his car that was there. Now we never had any trouble with anybody stealing anything when we lived there. And we left for all summer long every year, but we usually had somebody living in the help's quarters and if I were down there now, I would be afraid to leave the house even for overnight. My nephew was out here this winter from Wyoming and he went down and stayed in his camper at the back end of our ranch and while he was there at night, somebody came out, several people were in cars cruising around, but this one fellow wanted to know what he was doing there, and said he was on the Indio Police Auxiliary. I think that was what he called it. And before he was through, he offered to sell him dope. Now that, I think, is what's been going on to the back part. From all that was going, he said they had big guns, high powered guns. And there was an awful lot of

shooting all through the night out there. He stayed there several nights. He said he really was afraid to stay there. And he had spent a good many days as a little boy when we were there visiting us, and he loved it. We had a big lake at the back of the ranch with trees around it. It was, we irrigated from, it was a reservoir. And the kids used to fish there and they hunted rabbits and that was his memory of the place. And then to have that type of thing going on.

PY: Did you sell it as eighty acres?

OP: Yes. We still have an interest in it and our boy. It's to be developed and they were about ready to start last year when the interest started climbing so high because it was going to have to be financed. It's a forty million dollar development that they have everything ready to go. But it just wasn't the right time. It was last year. They had hoped to get it started. In fact, they had hoped to have the recreation building finished first because they will use that as a sales room. And in September we have our fiftieth wedding anniversary and we were going to have a reception in that recreation building, but we won't because it won't be ready.

RP: Show her the plan there.

OP: Well, you're interested in . . .

PY: Okay. What were you doing with the property other than just living there?

OP: Oh, we were farming. We raised winter vegetables, early tomatoes, and then as I say, in the forties we started some gladiolus. And we always had a few gladiolus or a few acres of gladiolus and different types of winter vegetables, green beans, corn, summer squash and tomatoes and then we had the rest of it in alfalfa. But we farmed it right up until we sold it.

RP: We had about thirty acres of dates. We farmed the whole thing too.

PY: What kind of dates,

RP: Yes.

OP: And then we had citrus planted between the dates, tangarines and grapefruit.

PY: Now you originally bought the property with the idea of having it to raise flowers. What happened to that idea?

OP: The depression in 1930, twenty-nine and the thirties. People were not spending, didn't have money to spend on flowers. So he went back to trying to get a job as a carpenter.

PY: And then why did you decide to do it in the forties?

OP: Well, when the war started, the Japanese flower growers were all interned and there weren't many flower growers, so he started with just a few gladiolus and found that there was a good market for it. And then he always raised a few other types of cut flowers for the local florists and the Palm Springs florists. And then they bought gladiolus too, but our main income was from the wholesale flower market in Los Angeles.

RP: We had a truckload of stuff go out three nights a week.

OP: A big refrigerator truck, and sometimes a truck and trailer of flowers three times a week as he said, Sunday night, Tuesday night and Thursday night, because the flower market was Monday, Wednesday and Friday, so they went in the night before.

PY: Why did you not expand with the flowers? Why did you go into vegetables?

OP: Oh, we'd had vegetables before we had flowers.

RP: Good reason. We had somewheres around thirty acres.

It might be thirty-five, it might have been thirty-eight, and after we got twenty-eight or thirty acres of flowers, you had to have another

OP: So there was always some crop that we'd have that we'd lose money on and if we had a variety of things, why, at

least we'd break even.

PY: But you eventually stopped raising flowers altogether?

OP: No, no. We were raising flowers right up until the time we left.

RP: I have pictures of my gladiolus. The whole ranch was planted up.

PY: Really?

OP: Well, they aren't colored.

RP: Thirty acres of them.

OP: I don't know whether I can find any of them or not. They aren't anything of . . .

PY: Anything that you had to actually develop the land. Can you talk about that a little bit?

OP: The what?

PY: Develop the land. In other words, it wasn't a farm when you . . .

OP: Oh. No, it was just raw desert. And you tried to level it with water pressure the very first, didn't you? I didn't see any of that, but he had like a funnel. It was this wide and it came up to a pipe about this long. And, of course, now the first thing he had to do was put this well in so that he had water. Well, then, I don't know how that was attached to the pump or a

pipeline but as he used that, it was flat on one side and came up this way. And as you'd move it around, it would move the sand and start to get it level. Well then he had enough money to buy a Ford tractor and he wore that out getting maybe five acres level. And he planted that to grapefruit and some date trees. And in those years, every date cost twenty-five dollars, every offshoot, so it took a lot of work to get money enough to buy it because the most he ever earned as a carpenter in those days was fifteen dollars a day. Of course, other things were fairly cheap, but twenty-five dollars apiece for a tree when you're earning fifteen dollars a day was a lot of money.

PY: Did you put in your own well?

RP: Yes. No, what was his name?

OP: Walter Dodge? He's the one who put in the *Laneum bawler* pump.

RP: No. Laying on the ground was this . . .

OP: He put in the well and then a man by the name of Keller had the pipe yard, and he put in the underground pipes for the irrigation.

RP: Well, yes. We had a guy come in and he had a tractor and he helped level the ground. He couldn't do any more

than this, and he was that way *you know*

He was working.

PY: Did he have equipment, though, for drilling the well?

RP: No.

OP: Oh, yes, when they drilled the first well, you had a well driller come in and . . .

RP: Yes.

OP: Do that, yes. Because everybody had to have a well that lived out in the country. Well, that was, I imagine, a fairly good business for the well driller.

RP: I forgot his name. He's dead a few years ago.

PY: Do you know how deep he had to go?

RP: A hundred and, about a hundred and seventy-five feet.

PY: And did the well last you for the entire time you were there?

RP: Yes.

OP: It caved in on us in 1947, and they had to put new casings, smaller casing and we used it just as a domestic well. And then they drilled another well for our irrigation. And just in the last year or two, they were cleaning out both wells and decided that the smaller one was not good enough to be used for anything, so I guess they would cap it and fill it in, but the other

well is to be used with the development, not for domestic water, but for the lakes that are to be in there. And the parkways that will be around. It will be irrigated from the lake that they put in.

RP: Let her see the plan of it.

OP: When she's ready, I will.

RP: All right.

PY: Yes, I think after we finish this, we can look at those. So you developed a section at a time then of the property.

OP: Yes. Just the same as you would in a yard in a brand new house if you were doing it all yourself. You'd get a garden in just so far, probably put plants around that side of your house and gradually work out a little further and that's what we had to do. Some of it could be hired, but an awful lot was just done. I didn't do too much, but I did the heavy looking on.

PY: But you weren't farmers. How did you gain an understanding of what to do?

RP: I raised flowers up in Costa Mesa, and I knew all about them. My main work was building houses and I did that. That was my job, was to build these houses, and I didn't build cheap ones. I put *those sixty shacks they were shacks* but the big houses were a hundred and fifty thousand.

In those days that was a lot of money. And they were nice houses.

OP: Well, he always had a desire to be a farmer and he had to do the other work to get enough money so he could buy the property and to start out.

PY: You know, you were showing me some of the techniques that you were using, such as using paper facing south, you said.

OP: Yes.

RP: I started all that stuff. Nobody got ahead of it. I did it first, and then the rest of them did it. I read the other night they started something. Why, I did that forty years ago.

OP: Well, the Japanese farmers there used what they called aeroweed. It was a real stuff weed that grew around marshy places down near the Salt and Sea. And they used that solid at the back of plants for the same idea as what the paper did. Well, eventually it was hard to get ahold of that and they had to figure out other ways. The first year that he raised tomatoes, they made a cap. Did you ever, as a child, have or see other people make what we called a soldier's cap out of newspapers the way you'd fold it? Well, it was similar to that.

And it fit over each tomato plant and it was open and faced to the south and got the sunshine in. We spent a good many nights folding papers like that and then they were put out the next day. Well, gradually they worked into other techniques. And we just got a magazine the other day from the Farm Bureau here in San Diego County, and on the cover was a picture of, I think it was tomatoes that had been planted, with plastic behind on a wire and the clothespins were holding it here and there. Well, that's just what he did when plastic became available. And we were the first ones that used plastic in the Valley. But there were a lot of big farmers. We were just small in comparison to some of the Japanese farmers that were in the Valley.

PY: Were you in the minority in terms of farming in the La Quinta area?

OP: Yes, there was no one else farming in that area at all.

PY: Was there any objection to your farming in that area?

OP: No.

RP: We were there first.

OP: Most of what was done there was dates and citrus. We were the only ones that were raising vegetables and

flowers. And we had a time beating off a lot of the people that came in. They'd walk right into the fields and start picking as if they were wildflowers and they had a perfect right to take what they wanted. Many a time I was screaming at people to get out of there.

PY: Can you tell me precisely where your property was located?

OP: Well, on Washington just a mile from 111 on the east side of the street.

PY: Okay.

RP: It was one mile up.

OP: It was one of the warmest spots through the winter months. And very seldom that we had trouble with frost. Everybody else had, it froze them out before it would affect us. In the lower end of the Valley, way down on the oasis area, they had hot well water and they didn't have too much trouble with frost. They come into the market quite early, but from there on . . .

RP: That was the first apartment.

OP: Yes. Because of the warm weather and the sandy soil and we had the name of having the sweetest grapefruit of anybody around. Of people that spent the winter

in Palm Springs we had any number of them that came every winter for over twenty years for our grapefruit. And if they bought anybody else's, they'd still come back to us. It wasn't as good as ours was. And when we put grapefruit in the county fair and date festival, all we ever did was what they call a display of five fruit on a plate. We always won a blue ribbon every year on our grapefruit.

PY: Did you have a fruit stand of some sort?

OP: No. But they just knew we had it and drove in. We had a packing house at the back of the ranch where we packed the vegetables that were being shipped and the flowers. And we had a freight car made into a refrigerator, with a refrigeration element because we had to store our bulbs in refrigeration in the summer months. And we always kept what we called onion bags, those big bags, they weighed about thirty-six pounds, I think. We always had a lot of those in refrigerators so if somebody came in, why it was ready. But we didn't advertise. In fact, we didn't encourage people to come in because we were too busy packing and getting stuff ready to go to the market, and to stop and wait on someone took a lot of extra time.

RP: Usually they would pretty well come in, our friends
(dog barking)

OP: I use the water pistol when she barks.

PY: Does it work?

OP: Oh, halfway. She doesn't like it at all.

PY: You were telling me earlier that women used to come to
the packing plant to work.

OP: Well, the date packing house in Indio. Different ones
that lived out on ranches and they raised dates, or
their husbands did, and then the few that lived in
town. The dates were picked in September and usually
they were through packing by Christmas. But an awful
lot of the people would work in there, the women, with
the idea of saving their money to pay rent to get out
of the Valley in the summertime because there was no
way to keep cool except if you could get into a swimming
pool.

PY: That's true. What did you do in terms of your vegetables
before you had refrigeration, and the bulbs? I guess
you really didn't have to deal with that, did you,
because it was after the war that you started planting.

OP: Yes, we did. As soon as we got into any big amount,
why we had to have refrigeration. One year we stored

them in town in a cold storage plant. Did we store them more than that one year?

RP: Not very long.

PY: Did it excape you?

RP: No.

PY: Oh.

RP: I was the only one who raised flowers, and then there was a guy bought a place at the other end of the Valley and he was

OP: Well, he was down in the oasis area.

RP: Yes. There was two, then there was two guys. And we were friends. I had a, when I cut down this place, this time my mouth is haywire. I can't . . . I can't talk today.

PY: Were you a good strong competition for the others, for other . . .

OP: Well, we had flowers when they wouldn't have them. The only competition we had was this area and out in the Oceanside area. And they had thousands more than we did. In fact, we bought a lot of our bulbs from the biggest grower here.

RP: He was my friend. His father and I were good friends, and then when he got big, he was the biggest grower.

OP: He took over the raising. Now his son is raising.

RP: Yes. He quit and . . .

OP: He's got an enormous big packing house over in Oceanside.

PY: How could you compete with them then?

OP: Well, we had our flowers at a different time. His came in in early spring and we would have them, we'd stock ours in November. And if we didn't have a frost, we would be through January and then we'd have a few more come in for Easter. And he was usually starting in Easter, too. But we were practically through by the time his started.

PY: Why do you think there are not more people then raising flowers in the Valley?

OP: I don't know.

RP: They didn't have us.

OP: Everybody's interested in making a lot of money without a lot of work, and there's a lot of work connected with that. But what I did all the time, well, I had to have help in getting them ready to ship, and I had what I called a call can. If they had two flowers open on the stem, on the gladiolus, they couldn't be shipped. And if they were broken or if they were crooked, I'd poke everything in that, and there wasn't, I don't think,

any organization and almost every church in the Valley had flowers at some time or other from us. That's what I kept them for and people would come out and see if they could get them for this party or that party. Now the Catholic church in Cathedral City used to come down every Saturday and I'd save them for them. And we are not Catholics, but we met the priest and he used to come visit us occasionally and that was how we started with them. And some of the other churches would ask occasionally. We never gave them for every week. I think really that church is the only one that got them every week.

PY: Who helped you? What kind of help did you have?

RP: Mexican.

PY: Just Mexican help?

OP: Well, I think one of the women that helped me is still living in Palm Desert, Montoya, Margery Montoya. I believe her son is postmaster there.

PY: Was, yes, he moved on . . . She was packing tomatoes for you or something then?

OP: No, she used to help me occasionally with packing flowers. I don't think she ever helped with the tomatoes. I don't remember that she did. Now that was

something that happened years ago. There were people who traveled from one tomato part of the country to the next and all they did was pack tomatoes and they were paid by the number of boxes. And we'd have the same ones year after year. I don't remember where they came from to our place. And then when the season was over at our place, they moved on to the next place.

PY: Now did you have living quarters for your workers?

OP: Not those type of packers. But for, we used a lot of, well, they called them *Braceros* They were the Mexicans that had a permit to come in. And we had living quarters for them, just bunkhouses. And then we had one family, they're still in the Valley, that we sponsored and they had eleven children, I believe, when they came in. Two or three of the girls, the women worked for us, they were through school, and the rest were still all grammar school children and went to school from there. And they bought homes in La Quinta and are still there.

RP: We had forty or fifty of them and they lived on the ranch and *half of them weren't here long and* they moved on.

OP: We hired wets too. You know what a wet is?

PY: A wetback?

OP: And the Immigration would come in and pick them up and the next morning by four o'clock they were back again. That would go on and on for several days, and then finally they'd leave us alone for awhile.

PY: Now did you have to take them into Indio to have them cash their checks or anything?

RP: Yes. I cashed them.

OP: Well, and during the main harvest, we would get them just extra men for that length of time. These were the *Braceros* and we had sleeping quarters for them, but there was another ranch that made arrangements to feed all of them. And they'd feed a hundred or more for all three meals. And we would have to take them into that place for their meals.

PY: Where was that?

OP: Well, the name of the man that was doing it was and his place was on the corner of 111 and Jefferson, I think. It was right in that, just across from Westward Ho, right in that area. The family may still have the place. I don't know. I haven't been down into Indio or in that part for, well, I guess, since I've lived over here. Been back to Palm Desert and to our

place, but no further in the Valley. And we raised two boys there. They went all through school there and went on to college. There was no junior college then, so they had to leave the Valley. One went to the University of California at Davis, and the other went to Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo for one year, and then he finished up over in Pomona at Cal Poly.

PY: Where did they go to school?

OP: In Indio. Our youngest son was in the Palm Desert school; he was in the seventh grade the first year that there was school there. And so he had the seventh and eighth grade at Palm Desert. And then for high school they had to go to Coachella High School. Indio High School wasn't built until quite a few years after they were away from the Valley.

PY: Was it difficult for them? Was there a bus that came and took them up?

OP: Yes. Some of the years the bus went right by our house. In fact, the grammar school bus, it was, there were different ones that had to come to our place to catch the bus. It was for quite a number of years the Peterson Ranch was the bus stop for them. And then for several years in high school, I had to take them to the

end of Washington on 52. And that's where the years that they got to learn how to drive. They'd been driving a tractor and knew all about it on the ranch, but they would drive from the bus stop to the ranch when I was in the car with them, either going up or coming back. That was their first experience on the main road.

PY: Were there many children in that area for them?

OP: No.

RP: Out on our ranch.

OP: We had a lot of Mexicans on our ranch, families, so they had Mexican playmates, but the Berketts, there was the youngest boy, was a little older than our oldest son, and both our boys and he played together. And then a few years later this Mr. Dollins that's on the Holmes ranch, there were two boys there the same ages as our boys. And then on the corner of Jefferson and 52, which was quite a ways, there were two more boys the same age as our two boys. And . . .

PY: Who were they?

OP: He was the superintendent of Coachella school. Blocker. And our boys, our youngest son and both the Blocker boys were in college together. In fact, they rented a house

and furnished it and lived there while they were in school in Pomona. But they don't see each other. Both boys are up in northern California, and they aren't in contact much.

RP: Our oldest boy, he has two airplanes and what does he call himself?

OP: What?

RP: What does he call himself?

OP: I don't know what he calls himself.

RP: I mean his business.

OP: Oh, well, he's a nutritionist in the cattle feed business.

PY: Sounds like he's taking after his father in terms of aviation.

OP: Yes, well, he's into it a lot deeper than his father ever was.

RP: He's got one pint, it cost him three hundred fifty-seven thousand dollars last year. This year he bought another one. He has two now.

OP: Well, this year he got one that his boys and his wife can handle. It's safer than his big plane.

PY: You were telling me about wild horses in Palm Desert.

OP: Well, they were Indian ponies. They were just let loose up on the Santa Rosa Indian Reservation. And many a time

when we would be coming home from Newport to our ranch, we'd have to wait until those darn horses got across the road on 111.

PY: When was this?

OP: Well, that was before Palm Desert was developed. And then during the war in 1942 and on through 1946, I guess, that was where they maintained all of the jeeps and all of that. Well, from then on, Palm Desert was developed and with a number of people and the activities, the horses didn't come into the area. And I suppose eventually they were caught or maybe they died, I don't know. But we used to have lots of picnics up in Deep Canyon, is what we always referred to that area, and then at Magnesia Falls was another picnic place. And Point Happy. And we'd have weiner roasts. They didn't call them barbecues in those days, but now Dorothy that I spoke of and her husband, they were in on most of those picnics. And they went to school down there. And so, I guess, they grew up in the area. I don't know how old they were when they was first there. As I said, I went there as a bride. My uncle was the manager of Sun Gold Ranch. It belonged to Tom Rosenberger and King Gillette, the razor blade man, and he took care of

the garden and everything that had to be done. And I was visiting them and that's how I met my husband.

RP: That's when I got stuck. (laughter)

PY: Now was that the ridge Gillette had in Palm Desert?

OP: No, that they developed later. But do you know where Sun Gold Gardens is? Well, as you go into Indio, it would be the first date ranch, I guess, beyond Jefferson on 111 on the north side of the road. And that was where he lived and my aunt and uncle lived there. The Gillettes lived in Palm Springs and then some years after we were married is when they bought the place. They might have owned it. But when they developed the place in Palm Desert. And they had a swimming pool there, a reservoir. But we used to go there real often just to swim.

PY: Now the place in Palm Desert, you say they bought it after you were married. Do you recall whether it was an existing ranch?

OP: No. They built the help quarters; I think, there were about six or seven houses quite a ways apart but they were in a line and the lower, well, it would be the north side of Palm Desert. It was called Palm Village at that time.

PY: Oh, are you saying that he sold, he bought a whole section and then sold part of it to Mullen?

OP: Yes, I imagine it was a section and they developed the back part, the north end, the lower part of it, planting date trees. I don't remember whether they had any citrus. It seems to me that's rather old back there. I don't know whether they raised citrus or not, but they had date trees back there and then they had the houses for the help. There was, oh, perhaps, two city blocks between each one. And I don't remember whether there was six or seven houses. They were white houses with green roofs.

PY: For the help.

OP: Yes. But the Gillettes did not live on the place at all. They didn't have a home there. Their home was in Palm Springs. And Mrs. Gillette had, I don't know how many fox terriers. And she had a man that was all he did was take care of her dogs.

PY: Was Palm Village in existence then when you were visiting your uncle?

OP: No. I don't remember just when it was developed.

RP: I find most, not all of them, but most of them, I planted their date palm.

PY: In Palm Desert?

RP: No, in . . .

OP: Oh, Sun Gold Gardens?

RP: Sun Gold Gardens.

OP: During the depression, before your time on earth . . .

PY: That's for sure.

OP: Everybody was broke and didn't make any different what the work was. If you could get a job with money attached to it, why you took it. And after we were married, he picked dates for two dollars and a half a day. And the next year after we were married, I worked in the date packing house for two dollars a day for eight hours. And half of the time there wasn't enough to pay the power bill to irrigate what we did have growing on the ranch. So unless people lived in those years, they have never known what hard times were. And we managed. We had a good time. But there was sure no money around.

PY: You know, one thing I can't understand. You were saying earlier you didn't develop that original hundred and sixty acres you got because there was no electricity back there, but the La Quinta Hotel was back there.

RP: They hadn't started it.

PY: Oh.

OP: Well, not when he bought it. But that property hasn't been developed yet. We sold it, oh, twenty years ago. And then when they were thinking of developing it, the county said it was too low and until the storm drains would be put in, they wouldn't give them a permit to build it. That's on one side. We owned on both sides of Washington. The other side was high enough and somebody in Carlsbad bought it. We never knew him. But he's never, I don't know whether he still owns it or not, but he's never developed it either. But there are plans to develop all of Washington on the east side. There's four hundred acres that was sold south of us and in back of us and they have all their plans. I don't know whether they have all their permits. We have all the permits on our place. Everything is ready to go and all the plans for the houses and everything. It's just waiting for final. And the other people, we were speaking of them yesterday, it's a Chicago firm, it's three different names with it, and the man that owns, originally owned it and sold it to them, I was talking to him on the telephone not too long ago, and he said that they had told him they were having

financial trouble and they probably would get behind on their payments, but they still had plans to go ahead. They were to put in a motel or hotel and golf course, and I don't know what else. And our plans were two hundred and twenty-four houses to be on it. And the majority of them will have water frontage to this lake and stream that's to be put in. So there are plans for all of that to be developed, but it hasn't. It still is just raw desert.

PY: How do you feel about that? Was it a difficult decision?

OP: For us? No, anything to get rid of it. It was just, the taxes went sky high. We couldn't make enough to live and pay the taxes. So, well, our taxes went one year from twelve hundred a year to forty-eight hundred, and then they just kept on going and when we left, they were over eight thousand dollars. That's ten years ago. And, well, we managed to put our two kids through college, but there wasn't any extra. We never could break even from one year to the next, so we were very happy to get out. And we sold it and then had to go to court and get it back. We got a small down payment and we never got another payment out of it and it took I don't know how many years before we could get it straightened

out again, big lawyer's fee. We were fortunate in that our lawyer is going to be in on the development and he bought in with part of what we owed him so that there wasn't cash out on that. But, no, I never regretted leaving there.

PY: It sounds like early on before the war that that was a real nice community in there, that there were always people around you.

OP: Yes. And everybody was friendly. And, well, everybody was busy working and then in the summertime those that could get out of the heat so there wasn't too much activity going in the summer. But . . .

PY: Did you associate much with anyone in the now Indian Wells area?

OP: No.

PY: So it was mainly that La Quinta group that . . .

OP: Well, we never cut our ties with our friends in Orange County and our families so we have always been family people and that's what we've been here. Our two boys and their families come to visit us continually and we have a lot of friends in this area, but still our family comes first. And that was the way it was. I had two sisters and he had a sister and brother and

our parents were living and they used to come down quite often and then when we could manage we were up to visit them. And then I had school friends because I grew up in Fullerton. And so we never made too many friends in the Valley.

PY: Did you ever at any point feel that La Quinta was a community? I know they certainly thought about incorporation.

OP: Well . . .

RP: It was just . . .

OP: We were more or less considered outsiders of La Quinta. Actually if there was anything, they were fighting us. They didn't like us, not when we began to think about having a mobile park there. Oh, there were lots of articles in the paper, and the supervisor sided in with the hotel.

RP: They're a bunch of crooks.

PY: The supervisors?

RP: Yes. The same was ahead of the bunch. They'd say yes to me and the minute they got outside, they were liars. They'd say yes to the *Jews* and they were. They were just . . .

OP: Well, we kind of left them all alone. There were a few

individuals that we knew and liked, but as a whole, well, after all when you live on an eighty-eight acre ranch and are working and the people that live on fifty feet in a little house, we had nothing in common. They were trying to boost their place and didn't want other people around. Why we left them around. We were there first and we had our own interests and, as I say, we left in the summer, so . . .

PY: Do you know how the road changed from the name Marshall to Washington?

OP: Well, Washington came through from the main freeway. What is that now?

PY: Ten, I-10.

OP: Is that what it's called? I'd forgotten since I've left the Valley. And then if you remember there's quite a curve to the east. Well, it couldn't go across the mountain. They never did put it in. In the cove there was a street there at the back of the hotel that was Washington. They picked it up again. And I guess eventually the supervisors decided as long as it all connected, it was better to just call it Washington right through.

PY: Marshall just went out of existence?

OP: Yes. You know the whole valley is named for the president, that was the first president, so that was how it . . . I suppose when it was first put in and laid out on the map, it was Washington, but the local people knew that it went to the La Quinta Hotel and it was just always called La Quinta Road. And I always said I lived on La Quinta Road. And then when they started delivering mail, it was called Marshall. And I don't remember when they changed to Washington. But in about 1938, I believe, they started to deliver mail from Indio three days a week out there. We always had a post office box in Indio. And I don't remember when they started it every day in the week.

PY: When did you get phone service out there?

OP: Oh, not until our oldest son was in high school, which was 1949 or 1950.

PY: Was it available or was . . .

OP: No, well, if we paid fifty dollars we could have had it brought either from 111 or 52, but it didn't go across Washington. It was to the La Quinta Hotel, but we didn't have the fifty dollars and nobody on our street had it either, so it never . . . I don't know how they happened to bring it in or when it was brought

in. I don't remember.

RP: When the hotel . . .

OP: But the hotel had it a long time before we had it.

And probably when all the homes were built at La Quinta they brought in telephones then, and maybe they figured they might just as well tie in with lll or they may have had to bring the main line in from lll. I don't remember.

RP: We got the first line off of it when they went through and they run that line to La Quinta.

OP: There were ten people on the line. We didn't have to hear the bell though for anybody but ourselves.

PY: The war years.

OP: Well, during the war years a lot of the officer's wives followed them and rented homes in the La Quinta area, the ones that were second homes to different people there. And we worked at the Methodist Church for the Red Cross in Indio and an awful lot of those women helped and one of them that used to work quite regularly was General Patton's wife. And a Mrs. Swingle, Frances Swingle is still living in Indio and she was one of the women, local women, but we had a lot more officers' wives

working than we did the local people. That was the main thing I had in mind about that. And there's one woman that we still exchange Christmas notes with that her husband was the second man who was the leader of the Blue Angels. He was stationed down there the last part of the war when the Navy Air Corps built the thermal airport. And we got acquainted with quite a few of them and we still correspond with her.

PY: So the Navy wives or the . . .

OP: Well, it was the Army wives too from Camp Young. And then later the Navy had the thermal air base.

PY: And they lived in those homes in La Quinta.

OP: They were into whatever they could get and they, an awful lot of those were available because gasoline was rationed and people that lived in the Los Angeles area didn't have enough gasoline to come down very often, so . . . and then a lot of the Japanese farmers had real nice homes and they were in the intern camp and their homes were rented to officers' wives. We happened to know one family fairly well and their home was ruined by some of the officers and officers' wives. They didn't care how they took care of things, but that didn't happen too often. Some of the other homes.

Have you got that turned on?

PY: Now I do. You can say the hotel again.

OP: The hotel used to take people horseback riding way back into the mountain in the north end of area, and they kept a great big grub box up there and the chef went out and lunch was served to them. It was an all-day ride up and back again.

PY: Oh.

OP: And that trail may still be there. It was still there ten years ago. There was some water. There was a spring and sand pond up there.

PY: I assume that the hotel really brought a lot of notariety or at least fame to the area.

OP: Yes. Because there were an awful lot of movie people that spent a good deal of time. And at that time it cost thirty-five dollars a day apiece for three meals and we felt you had to be a millionaire to stay there. Well, in comparison to present-day prices, it was reasonable. I don't know what they charge today, but plenty.

PY: I'm sure.